

Dissident Han set for American trip

From GEOFFREY CROTHALL in Beijing

DISSIDENT Mr Han Dongfang said last night he planned to leave for the United States next week in order to receive medical treatment, one year after he first sought permission to leave China.

Mr Han, 29, said he picked up his passport from the Beijing Public Security Bureau on Monday and was in the process of obtaining visas for himself and his wife from the American Embassy.

"There are still a lot of things I have to take care of but hopefully we will be able to leave in about a week," he said.

Mr Han is the second well-known dissident to be given permission to leave China this month.

Mr Wang Ruowang, China's "Grandfather of dissent", left Shanghai on August 5 to take up a position at New York's Columbia University and also to receive medical treatment for his failing eyesight.



Han Dongfang

Mr Han, known as China's Lech Walesa for his efforts to build a free trade union movement on the mainland, is suffering from tuberculosis and may require surgery on his right lung after he arrives in the United States.

His lung was badly damaged when he was beaten by security officers at Beijing court recently.

The court, which is trying to evict Mr Han from his family home, had held up his application to leave China for several months on

the grounds that legal action was still pending.

But the Beijing Public Security Bureau intervened on his behalf to ensure his passport was returned.

"It seems that they [the Public Security Bureau] are very keen for me to leave," he said.

Speaking from his wife's home in the south of Beijing, Mr Han said officers from the Public Security Bureau had told the Dongcheng District Court it was acting illegally by withholding his passport.

The court had said it would not return Mr Han's passport until he had personally removed all his belongings from the family home where he grew up.

But the Public Security Bureau discovered the company which owned the building containing Mr Han's apartment had already repossessed the property and therefore the court no longer had any reason to retain his passport.

"At least the Public Security Bureau is willing to

uphold the law," he said.

Mr Han, a former leader of the now outlawed Beijing Autonomous Workers Federation, was held in three different prisons for a total of 22 months for his alleged role in the pro-democracy demonstrations of May and June 1989.

He was charged in 1990 with "counter-revolutionary incitement and propaganda" but never actually tried for his alleged crimes.

Mr Han was released from the maximum security Qincheng prison and sent to a military hospital in April last year when his medical condition deteriorated. He was eventually allowed to return home.

Although very ill at the time of his release, Mr Han was kept under close surveillance by the authorities who wanted to ensure he did not resume his trade union activities.

He was detained by the police again this year on the night of June 3 after taking a walk with some friends near Tiananmen Square, but was released the next day.